

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 00423 01 OF 03 231406Z

45

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01 NIC-01

ACDA-19 AID-20 EB-11 DRC-01 /191 W

----- 024928

R 221340Z APR 74

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 359

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION GENEVA

USUN NEW YORK 036

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 DAMASCUS 0423

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT: PARAS 2 AND 3)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 00423 01 OF 03 231406Z

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

KUWAIT PASS MUSCAT
GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, UR
SUBJECT: SYRIAN/SOVIET RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE SEEMINGLY CLOSE SOVIET/SYRIAN RELATIONS, I BELIEVE THAT SYRIA UNDER PRESIDENT ASAD WILL CONTINUE TO PURSUE POLICIES BASED ON A SYRIAN ASSESSMENT OF WHAT SYRIA'S INTERESTS ARE WITH LITTLE, IF ANY, CONSIDERATION FOR SOVIET DESIRES IN THE MATTER. ALTHOUGH PRESENTLY IN A STRONG INTERNAL POSITION, PRESIDENT ASAD MUST HAVE AN ACCEPTABLE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT ON THE GOLAN IN ORDER TO ENABLE HIM TO CONTINUE THESE POLICIES AND PARTICULARLY TO PROCEED TO THE GENEVA TALKS. IN ADDITION HE MUST ACHIEVE A "JUST" SOLUTION TO THE ARAB/ISRAELI QUESTION INVOLVING, INTER ALIA, RETURN OF THE GOLAN IN EXCHANGE FOR EVENTUAL SYRIAN RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL. ASAD NEEDS SUCH A SOLUTION BECAUSE I ALSO BELIEVE THAT HE HAS CONCLUDED THE ONLY WAY HE CAN STAY IN POWER OVER THE LONG TERM IS TO ENABLE SYRIA TO BEGIN THE LONG OVERDUE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH THE SYRIAN PEOPLE WANT AND WHICH HE HAS BEEN PROMISING THEM. THE SOVIETS, THEREFORE, FIND THEMSELVES IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION AND WILL DOUBTLESS CONTINUE TO ATTEMPT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE THEIR ROLE BOTH IN THE CURRENT PEACE-MAKING PROCEDURES AS WELL AS IN ANY POST-SETTLEMENT ARAB WORLD. IN MY OPINION, HOWEVER, IF A JUST AND LASTING PEACE CAN BE ACHIEVED IN THE MIDDLE EAST OVER THE NEXT YEAR OR SO, THE FUTURE FOR THE WEST AND PARTICULARLY THE UNITED STATES IS BRIGHT BECAUSE IN THE LONG RUN THE MAIN ENEMY OF THE SOVIETS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WILL BE THE SOVIET SYSTEM ITSELF AND THE ARABS ARE WELL AWARE OF THIS FACT. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT ASAD HAS JUST FINISHED A FIVE DAY VISIT TO MOSCOW FROM APRIL 10 TO 15. THIS VISIT, WHICH ACCORDING TO AN EASTERN EUROPEAN AMBASSADOR, HAD BEEN ORIGINALLY CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 00423 01 OF 03 231406Z

PLANNED FOR MID-FEBRUARY, COMES AT A DELICATE TIME IN THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION WITH THE GOLAN STILL EXPLOSIVE AND ISRAEL INVOLVED IN A MAJOR POLITICAL CRISIS. OVER THE LAST THREE OR FOUR MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN MUCH SPECULATION IN THE AREA AND ELSEWHERE ABOUT SOVIET/SYRIAN RELATIONS AND THE IMPACT OF THESE RELATIONS ON THE ARAB/ISRAELI PROBLEM. MUCH OF THE WORLD'S NEWS MEDIA, PARTICULARLY THE ISRAELI PRESS, HAS BEEN TAKING THE LINE THAT THE

SOVIETS HAVE BEEN AIDING AND ABETTING SYRIAN INTRANSIGENCE ON THE GOLAN AND AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. THE STATEMENTS OF BREZHNEV AND PODGORNEY DURING THE ASAD VISIT WILL ONLY STRENGTHEN THE VIEW THAT THE SOVIET UNION, NOW OPENLY OPPOSING UNITED STATES EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE A PEACEFUL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, WILL PANDER TO AND ENCOURAGE EVEN FURTHER EXTREMEIST ELEMENTS IN SYRIA.

3. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT IN DAMASCUS, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT SOVIET INFLUENCE IN SYRIA HAS GROWN OVER THE LAST THREE OR FOUR MONTHS. IF ANYTHING ONE SENSES THAT SOVIET INFLUENCE HERE AS IN EGYPT IS NOW FRAGILE AND THAT THE SOVIETS ARE NOT SURE WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. THAT THEY ARE SEEKING SYRIAN REASSURANCES IS OBVIOUS. ONE WONDERS, HOWEVER, IF IN THEIR HEART OF HEARTS THE SOVIETS ARE NOT FULLY AWARE THAT AFTER WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN EGYPT NOTHING CAN ANY LONGER BE CERTAIN IN THE MIDDLE EAST NO MATTER WHAT THE ARABS TELL THEM. FOR THIS REASON, THEY MAY NOW WELL BE MAKING A MAJOR EFFORT BOTH THROUGH MILITARY AND ECONOMIC MEANS TO SHORE UP THEIR POSITION IN SYRIA (DAMASCUS 419).

4. DESPITE THE MASSIVE SALE OF SOVIET ARMS TO THE SYRIANS, DESPITE THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR SUCH PROJECTS AS THE EUPHRATES DAM, DESPITE THE MORE THAN \$3 BILLION WHICH SYRIA ALREADY REPORTEDLY OWES THE SOVIETS FOR THESE ARMS AND ASSISTANCE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE IN A POSITION TO DICTATE TO THE ASAD REGIME WHAT IT SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT DO WITH REGARD TO THE ARAB/ISRAELI PROBLEM. AS A RELIABLE SYRIAN OFFICIAL TOLD ME ON APRIL 21, "WE ARE MASTERS IN OUR OWN HOUSE AND BOTH THE SOVIETS AND THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 00423 01 OF 03 231406Z

AMERICANS SHOULD UNDERSTAND AND BELIEVE THIS." IN THIS, SYRIA IS NO DIFFERENT THAN EGYPT. A CLOSE READING OF THE LATEST SYRIAN/SOVIET COMMUNIQUE, FOR EXAMPLE, SHOWS THAT THE SYRIANS WERE CAREFUL NOT TO GET TOO CLOSE TO THE SOVIETS DESPITE THEIR MAJOR ECONOMIC AND MILITARY BLANDISHMENTS (SEE DAMASCUS 4087).

5. THE SOVIETS, OF COURSE, COULD CUT OFF ITS ARMS SHIPMENTS AS WELL AS THE VARIOUS DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. SUCH A MOVE, HOWEVER, WOULD IN OUR OPINION HURT THE SOVIETS AS
E E E E E E E

ADP000
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 00423 02 OF 03 230853Z

17

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01

ACDA-19 AID-20 EB-11 DRC-01 /190 W

----- 022089

R 221340Z APR 74

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 360

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION GENEVA

USUN NEW YORK 037

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 DAMASCUS 0423

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

KUWAIT PASS MUSCAT

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 00423 02 OF 03 230853Z

6. THE SOVIETS COULD ALSO ATTEMPT SOME COVERT POLITICAL
CAPER DESIGNED TO OVERTHROW ASAD OR TO ASSASSINATE HIM.
WE KNOW THERE ARE ELEMENTS IN SYRIA, BOTH FROM AMONG
FRUSTRATED SYRIAN SUNNIS AS WELL AS EXTREMIST BAATHIS

AND PALESTINIANS, WHICH WOULD BE AMENABLE. THUSFAR, IT APPEARS THAT ASAD'S VARIOUS SECURITY FORCES ARE ON TOP OF THE INTERNAL SITUATION AND BARRING AN ASSASSINATION OF ASAD HIMSELF THEY CAN THWART ANY SUCH EFFORTS. MOREOVER, ASAD'S PRESTIGE IN BOTH THE ARMY AND IN THE COUNTRY AT LARGE HAS GROWN SINCE THE OCTOBER WAR AND ASAD COMPARED WITH ANY OF HIS PREDECESSORS IN THE DAMASCUS PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IS NOW IN A RELATIVELY STRONG POSITION TO DO WHAT HE BELIEVES IS BEST FOR SYRIA. THE SOVIETS NO DOUBT KNOW THIS AND WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO TAKE A RISK PARTICULARLY WHEN THEY COULD LOSE SO MUCH IF THEY FAILED.

7. MEANWHILE, THE SYRIANS FOR THEIR PART, ARE NOT GOING TO BE STAMPEDED INTO THE AMERICAN CAMP BEFORE THEY HAVE FIRM INDICATIONS THAT THE AMERICANS CAN COME THROUGH WITH AN ACCEPTABLE DISENGAGEMENT. THE "SOUND AND FURY" ON THE GOLAN REPRESENTS, IN MY OPINION, A SYRIAN EFFORT TO UNDERSCORE THE NEED FOR DISENGAGEMENT SOON. IT DOES NOT, HOWEVER, MEAN THE SYRIANS WANT WAR OR THAT THEY ARE BEING EGGED ON BY THE SOVIETS. AS ONE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL RECENTLY TOLD ME, SYRIANS ARE BETTER BUSINESSMEN THAN THE EGYPTIANS AND THEY ARE NOT GOING TO "BUY AMERICAN" UNTIL THEY KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THE PRODUCT. NONETHELESS, THERE ARE STRONG LOCAL INDICATIONS THAT THE SYRIANS WANT TO "BUY AMERICAN" AND IF A DISENGAGEMENT IS ACHIEVED ON THE GOLAN THEN IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY DO SO. THE QUESTION THEN IS WHAT CAN THE SOVIETS DO ABOUT IT. EVERYTHING WE SEE HERE LEADS US TO SAY, "VERY LITTLE." IN THIS REGARD, THE POLISH AMBASSADOR WENT TO SOME LENGTHS THE OTHER DAY TO ASSURE ME THAT SYRIAN/SOVIET RELATIONS ARE STRONGLY BASED ON "MUTUAL CONFIDENCE" IN CONTRAST TO SOVIET/EGYPTIAN RELATIONS, AND THAT BOTH PARTIES ARE "COORDINATING" THEIR EFFORTS. YET HE HAD TO ADMIT THAT HE WAS NOT SURE WHAT THE SYRIANS WOULD DO CONCERNING DISENGAGEMENT AND PARTICULARLY WHAT THE SOVIET ROLE WOULD BE IN THAT

CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 00423 02 OF 03 230853Z

PROCESS.

8. THE ASAD REGIME LIKE ANY REGIME IS CLEARLY MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO STAY IN POWER. I BELIEVE, THEREFORE, THAT ASAD HAS SINCE HE TOOK OVER IN NOVEMBER 70, CONCLUDED THAT ONE GOOD WAY HIS REGIME CAN STAY IN POWER IS TO GET THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM OFF OF SYRIA'S BACK. THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY ONLY TWO WAYS HE CAN ACHIEVE THIS, BY WAR AND BY NEGOTIATION. HE KNOWS HE CANNOT WIN A WAR, DESPITE THE RECENT RHETORIC TO THE CONTRARY. HE HAS, THEREFORE, IN MY OPINION DEFINITELY OPTED FOR PEACE THROUGH NEGOTIATION. HE MAY REASON THAT IF A "JUST" SETTLEMENT CAN BE ACHIEVED THEN HIS REGIME

CAN DRAW NOT ONLY ON THE VAST ARAB WEALTH FROM THE CONSERVATIVE ARAB STATES BUT ALSO ON A GENUINE DESIRE ON THE PART OF MOST OF THE SYRIAN PEOPLE TO FOCUS SYRIA'S PRIMARY ATTENTION ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY. IN THIS, ASAD IS THINKING LIKE SADAT. AT THE SAME TIME, ASAD MAY ALSO BE COUNTING ON A SETTLEMENT AS A WAY TO ENHANCE THE APPEAL OF HIS NARROWLY BASED REGIME WHICH IS DRAWN FROM PRIMARILY THE ALAWITE COMMUNITY. MANY SUNNIS HAVE YET TO RECONCILE THEMSELVES TO THE ALAWITE ROLE AND ASAD HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN TRYING TO CURRY FAVOR WITH THEM BY ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION MEASURES AND GENERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EVER SINCE HE TOOK OVER.

9. THESE ARE GOOD REASONS, THEREFORE, WHY ASAD MAY WANT AND EVEN NEED A PEACE SETTLEMENT. HE CANNOT, HOWEVER, AS HE HAS SAID PUBLICLY SO MANY TIMES, ACCEPT ANY KIND OF PEACE. IT MUST BE A "JUST PEACE." FOR ASAD AND HIS REGIME "JUST" APPARENTLY MEANS THAT IN EXCHANGE FOR RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL AND A "REALISTIC" SETTLEMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION, SYRIA REGAINS THE GOLAN. I DO NOT INTEND TO EXPATiate ON WHAT A REALISTIC SETTLEMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION MEANS IN ASAD'S MIND. SUFFICE IT TO SAY, THAT HE HAS LEFT SYRIA'S POSITION ON THIS QUESTION VAGUE, "RECOGNITION OF THE LEGITIMATE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS." THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT SEEN AGAINST 25 OR 30 YEARS OF SYRIAN INTRANSIGENCE ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, ASAD'S CURRENT POLICY REPRESENTS A REMARKABLE SHIFT,
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 00423 02 OF 03 230853Z

INDEED, FOR SYRIA.

10. IN MY OPINION THE SOVIETS ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO AFFECT ONE WAY OR THE OTHER THIS SYRIAN POLICY SHIFT, AT LEAST AT THE PRESENT TIME. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IN VIEW OF THEIR OWN OFT-STATED COMMITMENT TO A PEACEFUL ARAB/ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ALONG THE LINES OF U.N. RESOLUTION 242. MOREOVER, BY COMMITTING THEMSELVES TO A "FULL" SOLUTION RATHER THAN A PARTIAL ONE IN THE LATEST SYRIAN/SOVIET COMMUNIQUE, THE SYRIANS MAY WELL HAVE PUT THE SOVIETS IN WHAT MAY TURN OUT TO BE AN UNDESIRABLE POSITION IF IN FACT THE SOVIETS WANT A NO-WAR--NO-PEACE SITUATION IN THE MEDDLE EAST AS SOME ALLEGE. IN ANY EVENT, UNLESS THE SOVIETS DECIDE TO EXECUTE A BASIC POLICY SHIFT THEMSELVES AND THROW THEIR LOT IN WITH THOSE ELEMENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD WHICH ARE NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM, THE SOVIET UNION ALONG WITH THE UNITED STATES, EGYPT, JORDAN, ISRAEL AND NOW EVEN USUALLY ODD-AN-OUT, SYRIA, IS WORKING FOR THE SAME GOAL, A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT ON THE LINES OF U.N. RESOLUTION

242.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 00423 03 OF 03 230932Z

17

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01

ACDA-19 AID-20 EB-11 DRC-01 /190 W

----- 022402

R 221340Z APR 74

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 361

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION GENEVA

USUN NEW YORK 038

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 DAMASCUS 0423

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

KUWAIT PASS MUSCAT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 00423 03 OF 03 230932Z

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

11. IN MY OPINION BOTH ASAD AND SADAT HAVE LONG SINCE CONCLUDED THAT ONLY THE UNITED STATES CAN BRING ABOUT A KIND OF SETTLEMENT THAT THEY ARE PREPARED TO LIVE WITH BECAUSE ONLY THE UNITED STATES HAS THE LEVERAGE OVER ISRAEL REQUIRED TO BRING ABOUT THE EVACUATION FROM THE LANDS OCCUPIED IN 1967. WHILE SYRIA NO DOUBT IS PLEASED, INDEED, TO HEAR SOVIET LEADERS INSISTING ON TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE LANDS OCCUPIED IN 1967 IN THE HOPE THAT THIS MIGHT BRING FURTHER PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE UNITED STATES, THEY STILL REALIZE IT IS ONLY THE UNITED STATES WHICH CAN ACT UNDER THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES TO BRING ABOUT A DISNEGAGEMENT AS A PRELUDE TO GENEVA.

12. THIS SYRIAN POSITION PRESENTS THE SOVIETS WITH AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DILEMMA. ON THE ONE HAND IF THEY GO AGAINST THEIR CURRENT POLICY OF WORKING FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND BEGIN SUPPORTING THE ENEMIES OF SADAT AND ASAD, THEY RUN THE RISK OF ANOTHER WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITH ALL THAT IT MEANS FOR U.S./SOVIET DETENTE. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE SOVIETS CONTINUE WITH THEIR PRESENT POLICY THEY RUN THE RISK OF SEEING UNITED STATES INFLUENCE IN THE AREA GROW. WHILE NOT A KREMLINOLOGIST I THINK THEY WILL OPT FOR CONTINUATION OF THE SECOND POLICY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DOING EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO ENHANCE BOTH THEIR ROLE IN ACHIEVING A FINAL PEACE SETTLEMENT AS WELL AS THEIR POSITION IN A POST-SETTLEMENT MIDDLE EAST.

13. DESPITE SOVIET EFFORTS OVER BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG RUN, I DOUBT THAT THE ARABS AND PARTICULARLY THE SYRIANS, WILL BE TAKEN IN. AS ONE RELIABLE FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIAL RECENTLY TOLD ME, "ALL OF OUR PRESENT DELAINGS WITH THE SOVIETS ARE A PRETENSE AND ONCE WE GET A SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB/ISRAELI QUESTION, THE WORLD WILL KNOW HOW WE FEEL ON THIS SUBJECT." THIS STATEMENT MAY BE AN OVER SIMPLIFICATION ON THE PART OF THAT OFFICER BUT I THINK IT ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE FEELING OF MANY SYRIANS AND OF MANY ARABS NOT ONLY NOW BUT SINCE THE ARAB/ISRAELI PROBLEM BEGAN. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE ARABS TOLD U.S. DIPLOMATS THAT "WE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 00423 03 OF 03 230932Z

ONLY WENT TO THE SOVIETS BECAUSE WE HAD NO WHERE ELSE TO GO." I AM CONVINCED THAT THIS STATEMENT CAN IN GREAT PART BE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE. AT THE SAME TIME, WHILE THE SYRIANS ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUY AND I REPEAT TO BUY SOVIET ARMS, THEY ALSO REALIZE THAT THESE TRANSACTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN CARRIED OUT BY THE SOVIETS IN A PHILANTHROPIC MANNER. AS ANOTHER FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL TOLD ME, "EVEN THE MEANEST MERCHANT IN THE SOUK DOES NOT BARGAIN THE WAY THE SOVIETS HAVE BARGAINED WITH US OVER THE YEARS TO GET AS MUCH OUT OF US AS THEY COULD FOR WHAT THEY HAVE GIVEN US." HE CONTRASTED THIS "CHEAP BEHAVIOUR" WITH THE "GENEROUS" WAY THE UNITED STATES DEALS NOT ONLY WITH ITS FRIENDS BUT EVEN WITH ITS ENEMIES. IN THIS REGARD, I HAVE HEARD FROM EXTREMELY RELIABLE SOURCES, THAT OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS THE SYRIANS HAVE PUT OUT FEELERS TO THE BRITISH AND TO THE ITALIANS CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITY OF ARMS PURCHASES IN THOSE COUNTRIES.

14. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE UNITED STATES OR THE WEST WOULD NOT HAVE HAD OR WILL NOT CONTINUE TO HAVE PROBLEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. WE WILL. THESE PROBLEMS MAY WELL CONCERN, FOR EXAMPLE, SUPPLY OR THE PRICE OF OIL, THE QUESTION OF LANDING RIGHTS OR OTHER ACCESSIBILITY QUESTIONS. NONETHELESS, THEY CAN ALL BE APPROACHED IN A BUSINESSLIKE IF NOT FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE ONCE THE ARAB/ISRAELI PROBLEM IS SETTLED.

15. IN CONCLUSION, WHILE I BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE AND WILL REMAIN A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IN SYRIA, I ALSO BELIEVE THAT THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR THE WEST AND FOR THE UNITED STATES IN PARTICULAR, IF WE CAN GET A PEACE SETTLEMENT AT THIS TIME. I SAY THIS BECAUSE WITH THE RETURN OF PEACE AND NORMALITY TO THE AREA THE SOVIETS WILL FIND THAT THEIR GREATEST ENEMY IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS NOT THE UNITED STATES, NOT THE ARABS, BUT THE SOVIET SYSTEM ITSELF. THE ARABS BOTH BY CULTURE AND RELIGION HAVE NOT FOUND AND WILL NOT FIND THE SOVIET SYSTEM APPEALING. WITHOUT XBELABORING THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT, IN THE ECONOMIC, EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL AND EVEN IDEOLOGICAL AREAS, THE SYRIANS

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 00423 03 OF 03 230932Z

AND THE ARABS ALONG WITH THEM KNOW THE SOVIET UNION CANNOT COMPETE WITH THE WEST AND THE UNITED STATES. AGAIN AS MY SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY CONTACT TOLD ME, "A SYSTEM THAT AFTER 50 YEARS CAN STILL NOT FEED ITS OWN PEOPLE; HAS TO USE ARMEIES TO KEEP ITS ALLIES IN TOW; EXILES TWO OR THREE OUTSANDING INTELLECTUALS BECAUSE IT FEARS THE EFFECT OF THEIR WORDS, THAT SYSTEM IS WEAK

AND FRIGHTENED DESPITE ITS FACADE OF STRENGTH. ON THE
OTHER HAND A SYSTEM THAT NOT ONLY FEEDS ITS OWN PEOPLE
BUT CAN FEED ALMOST THE ENTIRE WORLD; CONTINUES TO DEAL
WITH ITS ALLIES AND REIENDS AS EQUALS, EVEN WHEN THESE
ALLIES DIFFER ON BASIC ISSUES; AND, FINALLY, CAN INDULGE
IN SELF-EXAMINATION TO THE POINT OF CONSIDERING THE
IMPEACHMENT OF ITS PRESIDENT, THAT SYSTEM IS ALIVE
AND VITAL. WE ARABS DO NOT HAVE TO BE FED ANY
PROPAGANDA TO KNOW TITH WHICH SYSTEM WE WOULD LIKE TO
COOPERATE, DO BUSINESS AND WHICH WAY OF LIFE TO EUMLATE."
SCOTES

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974DAMASC00423
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740094-1159
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740425/aaaaawfs.tel
Line Count: 504
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 10
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 22 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <26 MAR 2003 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRIAN/SOVIET RELATIONS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, UR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005